

## A WORD OF TESTIMONY

My testimony is the usual Northern Ireland model having been brought up in a strongly evangelical home where my parents ensured that we knew the gospel from childhood. Good conduct was encouraged and enforced and only works deemed necessary were allowed on the Lord's Day. My Father, long since deceased was heavily involved in a local Interdenominational group who conducted gospel witness in the town. He was active in open air, mission hall and singing and wore a Faith Mission badge on his lapel. He was almost totally blind and after learning the Braille language read the complete Braille bible at least five or six times. My Mother, still alive is an avid reader of the Scriptures, prays every day and witnesses with little regard for who you are and if it is in season or otherwise. She was a watch tower over our lives and ensured that we knew our scriptures; monitored our literature and the company we kept. Sunday was generally a busy day with Sunday classes, two main services and an after-church rally when available. The family altar was observed every evening when we engaged in prayers and scriptures reading. Many visiting speakers and missionaries were entertained in our home. Even our summer holidays incorporated Portstewart Convention as well as outdoor pursuits on sea and sand. We never rebelled against our parents for intense religious upbringing and respected their guidance. It was at Portstewart Convention that I first experienced a challenge about my soul's salvation. While visiting my aunt who was a Faith Mission Pilgrim; another Pilgrim stooped down and spoke to me as I held my Mother's hand and asked if I had taken the Lord Jesus into my heart. At that moment I knew I had not done so, however, knowing my Mother could hear and that she expected me to be a Christian; I was ashamed to say otherwise. The Pilgrim not knowing

the tight corner she had caused for me asked when it happened and I could not remember. She assured me that doing it was more important. Throughout my early and teenage years I attended several types of missions including those that provided hell-fire preaching and strong appeals. I got to like 'strong preaching' and the type that unsettled me, but I could not find strength to publicly settle my salvation. After schooling I went to serve an apprenticeship where I met the worldly side of life and made friends with colleagues who were unsaved. The tough culture of the workshop began to affect me and sometimes my behaviour was not in accordance with my upbringing. Only after I got saved did some Christians speak to me about my personal experience. For several years my family attended a local Baptist church under the preaching of Pastor Robert Martin who baptised us in later years; some people from our previous church were unhappy with our decision to leave 'our own' church. Many times as I listened to Pastor Martin I felt my heart throb with conviction and sometimes broke into a sweat. The power of conviction was so strong at times; I actually asked God to take it easy; I was afraid my emotions would become excessive in front of those who expected me to be a Christian. I was unaware that my family already suspected my condition. Sometimes I tried to avoid gospel meetings to escape the challenge but worried that God's voice was getting weaker the longer I delayed. Scriptures' such as "My Spirit shall not always strive with man - he that hardens his neck shall suddenly be cut off and that without remedy" echoed in meetings. Sometimes I listened at night to hear if my parents were breathing in case the Lord had returned. Occasionally, I privately asked Jesus to save me but never felt much different, like I heard from platform testimonies.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1962, I attended the Baptist church and felt conviction very strong. At the end of the service I promised myself that if the Pastor made an open appeal like in the missions I would make the break and go forward for salvation. I did not realise that I was laying down my own conditions how I would come to the Lord. It did not happen and I left the church to feel the cold night air against my sweating face. We then went to an after-church rally in the town hall. This was sponsored by the Interdenominational Committee my father was a member of. The place was packed so I took a rear seat in the balcony. During the meeting the words "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" came to mind. At the close of the meeting the American evangelist Mr Paul Finch made an appeal and asked all those who felt their need of salvation to come to the front of the

hall. I was prompted by a voice inside that I had spurned and insulted the Lord's graciousness for too long; this could be my last chance before judgement. I decided to respond whatever the meeting required hoping that God would still accept me. My emotions were more controlled than before but I felt free having made a public stand. Quite a few people gathered round the platform and we were each allocated to a counsellor. My conversion was not easy; I was not keen on the man appointed to counsel me; I had heard of his opposition to the Baptist's witness; strangely he asked me if I had anything against anyone. I was unaware of hatred against anyone but decided having come so far I was not turning back and would go through with God's challenge. I asked the Lord to clear any blockages within me and while responding knelt down and asked

the Lord to forgive my sins and save my soul. When I reported for work the next morning I took gospel tracts and went to every member of the workshop both Protestant and Roman Catholic telling them I had got saved. Some remained silent, one joker said that maybe the Lord had mercy on them by saving me; a Roman Catholic caretaker congratulated me and wished me well; later on an unsaved colleague told me not to lose my Saviour when workers tested me. From that moment on through various occupations I made people aware of my position and sought to witness; I often found that Roman Catholics were more open to discussion. Unfortunately, freedom to witness as a public employee is more difficult. Like most, I experienced times of testing but always experienced the Lord's presence, guidance, protection and provision. My home has been enriched through Christian fellowship, witness and involvement in missionary support. Jesus Christ is alive and real and even although the work of Satan is to disrupt the witness and experience of the Lord's people his wrath is under the control and plan of God. Someone may be living under the expectations of a Christian family and church while knowing they only possess a head-knowledge with little heart experience. A personal relationship with Jesus Christ is essential even though you are part of a crowd. There is an end to every beginning; you know when God is speaking; you don't know when He may cease. When Jesus calls us to repentance and to follow Him; we must demonstrate our willingness, He will do the rest. "Wilt thou be made whole was a popular question?".

*David Barbour*